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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, February 22, 2008

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-5
Juvenile Justice	6-9
Domestic Violence	10-15
Food Assistance	16-18
Energy Assistance	19

*Important story at this spot

Grant pays for kids' terror Murdered wife's family grateful judge heard plea

BY AMBER HUNT AND BEN SCHMITT • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS • FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Two pictures that Stephen Grant's daughter drew for her therapist were given Thursday to a Macomb County judge.

Erik Standerfer, her husband, said he believes the daughter didn't come forward with what she said she saw until Christmas Day because she was scared. He said in a statement issued after the sentencing that he listened as the girl "described the night Tara was killed, what she saw, what she felt, what she heard, what she tried to do to make it stop, and it is nothing short of terrifying."

"My wife and I began to weep as she described checking her mother's still warm eyelids to see if she was dead or alive after Stephen left the room."

The girl also watched in hiding as Grant rolled his wife's body to the door, Erik Standerfer said in the statement.

The Grants' children -- the son is now 5 -- have been thrown into the spotlight because of the slaying. Aunts on both sides of the family vied to adopt them. A probate judge last month awarded custody to the Standerfers of Chillicothe, Ohio, who get to decide who can visit them.

Last week, the prosecutor's office said in its sentencing motion that Stephen Grant should be sentenced above and beyond even the probation department's 40- to 60-year recommended minimum, in part because the children said they saw the killing.

"We found out about it in January," said Prosecutor Eric Smith, who tried the case. "The police department found out about it in January. So that's why it didn't come out in trial."

Grant told investigators in a nearly four-hour statement that his two children were asleep in the house when he and his wife fought about her hectic travel schedule, which he claimed led him to snap and strangle her.

Alicia Standerfer said Grant's daughter seemed relieved when she learned he was convicted in December.

"I think that probably spearheaded her to be able to relax a little bit," she said. "As adults, we know how difficult it is to bear the burden of something, even just a little secret, let alone something as enormous as what she was carrying."

Grant's lawyer, Stephen Rabaut, said the children's psychologist knew as early as May that at least the daughter said she had seen the slaying.

However, information shared between psychologists and patients -- even those who are minors -- is generally privileged except when patients say they plan to hurt themselves or someone else.

No one spoke on Grant's behalf before the sentencing. Rabaut advised Grant not to address Druzinski, one hint that he might be planning to appeal. Another hint came when Rabaut said the trial's outcome might have been different if the children had spoken up earlier.

"There were no eyewitnesses to these events before, and now it turns out there may have been," said Rabaut, who had asked the judge to sentence his client to the minimum 15 years.

Grant has 42 days to file an appeal.

Mary Destrampe, Tara Grant's mother, said that once in court during the trial, Stephen Grant told her he was sorry. "How could he tell me he was

sorry for squeezing the life out of my daughter and mutilating her body?" she asked in a written statement to Druzinski.

As Grant listened to his former in-laws call him a monster -- and the judge call his actions "demonic, manipulative and barbaric" -- he sat largely stone-faced. He appeared to cry once, when Alicia Standerfer played for the judge a video showing photos of her sister.

Gary Hafner, 39, the jury foreman in Grant's trial, said he was happy with the sentence. "I think he got his just reward, especially with all his conversations that were taped between him and his sister and his lack of remorse."

Hafner was referring to more than 30 hours of recordings prosecutors released this month in which Grant and his sister, Kelly Utykanski, joked about his notoriety in jail and made off-color comments about Tara Grant.

After the sentencing, Utykanski, from Sterling Heights, didn't say how she felt about the decision. "We're glad it's over so our family can get on with normality," she said.

Life won't get back to normal for Tara Grant's family, her sister said. But it will go forward. "The sentence that the judge handed down today, 50 to 80 years in prison, reflects basically Steve's natural life," Standerfer said, "and our family is so grateful for that."

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Study ties smoking to childhood trauma

BY MARILYN ELIAS • USA TODAY • FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Childhood abuse or physical violence in young adulthood greatly raises the odds of someone starting to smoke by their early 20s, a new study suggests.

Smokers often find their habit relaxing, "and this may be how they cope with the trauma," says study leader Bernard Fuemmeler, a pediatric psychologist at Duke University Medical Center.

"Survivors of traumatic experiences will say they just want to get back to normal. But for some it's like having a broken leg -- you can't just go on and pretend it never happened," he says. "You need to get help or there will be bad effects."

Fuemmeler and coauthor Miguel Roberts followed more than 15,000 young people from age 15 to about 22. They found a link between reports of childhood sexual or physical abuse and regular smoking that begins in the teen years.

Exposure to a physical assault in the past year -- either witnessing it or being a victim -- nearly doubled the odds of a young adult starting to smoke within a year.

And violence in any relationships -- pushing, slapping, kicking -- also raised the risk for becoming a smoker soon after.

The report will be published in the March issue of Journal of Adolescent Health.

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Boy Accused In Bus Assault Accepts Plea Deal

POSTED: 10:00 am EST February 22, 2008

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HOWELL, Mich. -- An 11-year-old boy accused of sexual misconduct involving a 7-year-old boy on a Howell public school bus in May entered a plea agreement on Thursday that will keep him off of the sex offender registry.

The boy pleaded no contest to gross indecency between males in exchange for prosecutors dismissing first- and second-degree sexual conduct charges, according to The Livingston County Daily Press & Argus.

Sentencing is March 10.

Meanwhile, no resolution has been reached for a 10-year-old co-defendant who faces the same charges.

His trial is expected to begin in April.

The boys were accused of forcing a 7-year-old to perform oral sex while on the bus.

Previous Stories:

- February 12, 2008: [Details To Be Released In Suspected Bus Assault](#)
- September 19, 2007: [Boys Charged With Forcing 7-Year-Old To Perform Oral Sex On Bus](#)

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Action on assault report up to administrators, school board says

Howell schools chief has his name cleared by independant inquiry and report

Friday, February 22, 2008

BY TOM TOLEN

The Livingston Community News

Howell Public Schools administrators now have in their hands a report that seeks to clear up communication gaps in how the district handled allegations of a student sexual assault aboard a school bus.

School board President Phil Westmoreland said the board will take no formal action on the 62-page report, which was prepared by the Thrun Law Firm of East Lansing and released Feb. 13 by the district.

"The recommendations are up to administration," he said.

Westmoreland also said the bus incident report will not be discussed at Monday's school board meeting "unless a board member believes there is some responsibility" on the part of Deputy Superintendent Lynn Parrish or Superintendent Chuck Breiner.

The report is clear that Breiner was never told of the May 2007 incident until September. Breiner was placed on administrative leave by the school board the week before the report was released.

While Parrish was aware of the incident, she maintains she did not know it involved allegations of criminal sexual assault, according to the report. Parrish is the district's acting superintendent while Breiner is on leave.

Parrish, who was to return today from a weeklong vacation, said before she left she would meet individually with school district personnel interviewed for the report to determine whether it correctly reflects what they said in the interviews. "There is a question about whether all are in agreement with the information attributed to them in the report," she said.

The law firm was asked to investigate the district's handling of the incident in which a 7-year old boy was sexually assaulted by two other boys, ages 9 and 10, in May of last year. Although district buses have video cameras, the video recording on that bus on the date in question did not depict any unusual activity, and according to the report the bus driver was unaware of what was going on at the time.

Breiner had been criticized for his handling of the situation, but the report clears him of any impropriety.

"It is clear from the numerous interviews that prior to Sept. 17, 2007, the superintendent had no prior knowledge of any alleged sexual activity of any kind," the report states in its conclusions. The report is less clear on who in the district's administrative ranks knew what and when about the incident and the specific allegations.

A few questions were not answered in the report, such as why Breiner was kept out of the loop when several other administrators knew the issue - initially thought to be a case of bullying - turned out to be a criminal matter involving a sexual assault.

Breiner said he hopes the report will allow the community to move forward from anger and accusations to understanding and healing.

"I think, for me, this has always been an issue about three boys and their safety and well-being," Breiner said last week. "It is my hope it will allow the community to move from anger and accusation to understanding and repair."

School board Vice President Jeannine Pratt said the report vindicates the superintendent. "All along, I didn't believe he had any prior knowledge," she said.

A total of 12 people were interviewed during the investigation - including Breiner, Parrish, the principals of Southwest and Challenger elementary schools, director of operations Mike Peterson, the transportation supervisor, three school secretaries, a Howell police officer, a Livingston County Sheriff's detective and a sheriff's deputy.

The report makes a number of recommendations for changes in the way "critical incidents" are reported, logged and tracked to conclusion.

The two boys accused of assaulting the 7-year-old have been charged with first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct and gross indecency. Their cases are being handled in Livingston County Juvenile Court. The boys and their families were in court Feb. 15 for a settlement conference, but officials and attorneys made no comment on a possible settlement.

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Vandal suspects likely headed to juvenile court

Friday, February 22, 2008

The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- Kent County prosecutors have authorized a petition against four teens accused of vandalizing Wyoming Park High School, which will spend more than \$50,000 to repair the damage.

The charges are against Tina Abbott, 15; her brother, Robert Abbott, 16; and two of Tina's 16-year-old friends, Malory Maciejewski and Jeni Leigh Silcox, stemming from two break-ins at the school.

Early next month, juvenile court authorities will determine whether to ask a judge to sign the petition, which would bring the teens to juvenile court.

The judge could decide the cases should be diverted to other programs, which is unlikely in a case involving felony charges of malicious destruction of property and breaking and entering.

The first hearing would come after the March court appearance at a pretrial conference, where it would be determined if the teens would proceed to a full trial or whether an agreement with prosecutors can be reached.

Police say the Abbotts and Maciejewski broke into the school on Feb. 5 and went on a rampage.

Police say on Jan. 31, the girls broke into the school and caused a smaller amount of damage.

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Man arrested for disorderly conduct

FROM STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY -- Police arrested a man for disorderly conduct outside the Bay Hill apartment complex.

Traverse City police responded to a domestic assault complaint shortly after midnight Wednesday. Officers arrived and found a woman, 39, had cut her wrists in an attempt to harm herself after an argument with a 29-year-old man, a police statement said.

The man, who allegedly was intoxicated, became belligerent and yelled vulgarities at officers as they helped the woman. Authorities took her to Munson Medical Center for treatment.

Officers arrested the man for disorderly conduct. Two children at the residence, ages 12 and 4, were turned over to a relative. The incident will be investigated by the state Department of Human Services, authorities said.

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DR. SOPHIE WOMACK: 1954-2008

A wife, mother and leader, Womack's fingerprints are all over

BY CASSANDRA SPRATLING • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER •

FEBRUARY 22, 2008

Dr. Sophie Womack was not the kind of person to lend her name to a cause without working to make it better.

One day she and her friend Diana Jones were discussing domestic violence, and Jones said, "We ought to do something."

"The next thing I knew Sophie called me with a brilliant plan to raise money for the three domestic violence centers in Wayne County," said Jones, vice-president of Community Affairs for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

The women started the 21st Century Club, an organization that raised more than a half-million dollars through an annual fund-raiser; Womack did much of the legwork.

"That's the thing about Sophie, not only did she take care of babies, she took care of the whole community," Jones said. "You have a lot of big names who lend their names, but they don't really work. If Sophie's name was on it, she was hands-on."

And Sophie Jan Womack's hands were on many causes, including reducing racial disparities in infant mortality rates, reducing sudden infant death syndrome cases, helping domestic abuse victims, educating people about health care and improving health care services in general.

She did that while being a mother, a wife and seemingly tireless fund-raiser for charitable causes that she championed in metro Detroit and statewide.

Womack, 53, died Sunday of complications from surgery. Her death leaves a huge hole in the heart of the city she embraced with gusto after moving here

more than 25 years ago to do her residency at Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit.

She had another special reason for coming here: She had married Dr. Jimmy Womack, a Detroiter she met when they were students at Meharry Medical College in Nashville. He is a member and former president of the Detroit school board.

Funeral services are today at Plymouth United Church of Christ in Detroit, where Womack was an active member, a soloist and a key organizer of a ministry designed to strengthen marriages.

"One of the things that was unique about Sophie and the reason so many people have been touched by her death is that her friendships were not monolithic," said the Rev. Nicholas Hood III, pastor of the church. "She reached across racial, social and economic lines. She was very comfortable dealing with people who didn't have as much money or education as she had. She carried her blessings very well."

A trail of firsts

Womack was a trailblazer for women and for African Americans. In February 2006, she was appointed as the vice-president of medical affairs for Harper University Hospital and Hutzel Women's Hospital. She was the first woman to hold that position at the Detroit Medical Center.

She was the first African-American woman to serve as president of the Wayne County Medical Society of Southeast Michigan, a position she was elected to in May. From 2004 to 2006, she served as president of the Detroit Medical Center medical staff; she was the first woman and the first African American to hold that position.

She was also an associate professor of pediatrics at Wayne State University School of Medicine and the former chief of neonatology -- her specialty -- at Sinai-Grace Hospital.

"She broke barriers for all women through her leadership positions," said Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm. "We've lost not only a great doctor, but a great leader. So many young girls who came into contact with her saw what they could become. Her death is a real loss for her family, for the city and for the state, too."

Balance, success and sacrifice

Womack, a Killeen, Texas, native, graduated from Howard University in Washington, D.C., before going to Meharry. The couple have two daughters, Brandi, 22, who recently graduated from Howard and Ashley, 20, a student at Bennett College in Greensboro, N.C.

Her daughters said they were inspired by her example, especially the way she balanced motherhood with her other activities and her determination to be successful.

Brandi Womack said her mom could sense when she needed her, even if Brandi didn't call her. The week before her death, Womack decided on the spur of the moment to visit Brandi in New York, where she had recently moved.

"Even though she should have been resting, getting ready for her surgery, she spent the entire weekend helping me get settled," said Brandi, an event planner. "I think that's what she enjoyed, making sure other people are comfortable, even if it meant sacrificing herself."

Champion for children

Sandra Frank, executive director of Tomorrow's Child/Michigan SIDS, based in Lansing, called Womack a "huge, huge and fearsome advocate for children, especially babies."

"She was our champion," Frank said. "We are just devastated by this loss."

"Sophie did with our organization what she did with others; she grabbed hold of it and made change happen," Frank said.

Frank said Tomorrow's Child will hold activities throughout the rest of this year to honor Womack. "She made us one of the strongest organizations of its type in the country. She was all about diversity and reducing the disparities in infant death rates. She was the person who initiated so many infant safe sleep projects throughout the state. She was doing it on our behalf and because it was a passion."

Even more amazing, she said, is that Womack would drive from Detroit to Lansing on a Sunday afternoon to participate in programs for grieving families; she would not only talk with and comfort them, she'd sing soul-stirring songs.

Womack's singing was one of her lesser-known, but widely appreciated gifts.

"It sent chills through you; it was that make-you-throw-your-hands-up-in-the-air kind of singing," said one of her many girlfriends, Lydia Price Griffin of Detroit. "I'm so glad to have had her in my life. The world is a different place because of Sophie Womack."

Adam Jablonowski, executive director of the Wayne County Medical Society of Southeast Michigan, praised her ability to work to resolve disputes with grace and diplomacy.

"I've been working with physicians since 1966 and in that time I've met two incredibly exceptional people and she's one of them," said Jablonowski, an administrator of the group that advocates on behalf of physicians, patients and medical students. "She knew how to deal with differences between people without antagonizing anyone."

Gregory and Novella Daniels of Harper Woods are among many parents whose children Womack helped.

Their son, Gregory II, was born four months early and weighed 1 pound, 11 ounces.

Because of complications he was sent to Children's Hospital, where Womack monitored him closely.

"Now, he's just a happy little baby; he smiles all the time," Gregory Daniels said of his son who turned 2 on Feb. 3. "It's a blessing to see him running around getting into things. He is our testimony to her."

Children's Hospital of Michigan President Dr. Herman Gray said he encouraged Dr. Womack's interest in sudden infant death syndrome. "She became an expert in her own right, and ultimately more of an expert than myself because of her drive and commitment to children."

Gray said he used to jokingly tell her she was practicing medicine part time so she could finance her full-time job as a fund-raiser and party-giver for causes she was passionate about. "She is the only person who could convince my wife and I to be in an office licking stamps and stuffing envelopes on a Friday night," he said. "I'd look up and think, 'Why am I here; I'm a highly paid professional.' But Sophie was that kind of person."

"She made Detroit better," Gray said. "She made the Detroit medical community better. And southeast Michigan is a better place by her being here."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Bowl sales help feed the hungry` Kids don't usually have the opportunity to make a difference, but they did tonight'

Friday, February 22, 2008

BY KELLE BARR

Special to the Gazette

PORTAGE -- A thousand empty bowls filled the high school cafeteria, as did the sounds of a 60-piece middle school jazz band.

Barrels of soup were flanked by piles of bread.

Several hundred people were shoulder-to-shoulder in the Portage Northern High School cafeteria Thursday night to take part in Empty Bowls, a nationwide project in which a simple meal of soup, bread and water is served and bowls are sold to raise money to fight hunger.

Art students from all 14 schools in Portage Public Schools used their creativity to support the effort. Fifth-through 12th-grade artists crafted the bowls that were sold, and kindergartners through fourth-graders created handmade place mats used during the soup supper.

The suggested donation for each bowl was \$5. The proceeds, expected to reach thousands of dollars, will go to the Portage Community Center.

It was the first time the Portage school system participated in Empty Bowls, and Portage Mayor Peter Strazdas was amazed at the turnout.

"This is so festive," Strazdas said. "Social services, the schools and the community all coming together -- this is what a community should be all about."

Portage Northern High School junior Drew Everett, one of dozens of volunteers, said the event was an opportunity for everyone to get involved in a charitable cause.

"People who normally don't get to help out got a chance to be here," Everett said. "Little kids don't usually have the opportunity to make a difference, but they did tonight."

Some bowls made by the students resembled elaborate sculptures. Others were painted to resemble soccer balls or flowers. Some featured sea creatures and animal faces. One was fashioned into a clay crown adorned with faux pearls. Notes from creators accompanied many of them.

Some students couldn't bear to sell their bowls to strangers, so they came and bought their own bowls.

The bowl that Strazdas purchased, designed by an Angling Road Elementary School student, featured a snowman impression and the words "Cool" and "Hi!" carved into clay. The art was accompanied by a few words from the creator, thanking the mayor for helping the hungry.

"I got a really cool bowl," Strazdas said.

Art teacher Donna Emerson, who coordinated the event and teaches at Angling Road and Woodland Elementary schools, praised the students for their work and participation.

"Normally, these kids make art for their own self-expression," Emerson said. "This was different. They

knew they were doing this to help feed hungry people. They knew that if the bowls were sloppy, no one would purchase them and more people would go hungry."

"I'm a social worker, so I'm passionate about things like this," said Pamela Haymon, 44, who brought her daughter, Carmela Harris, to the dinner. "This speaks loudly about our community."

Holly Lielzuika browsed the bowls while her son, Andrew, 13, of Portage North Middle School, played his trumpet in the band. She said the event helped dispel a misconception about the city.

"So many people think that there are no needy people in Portage, and that's not true," Lielzuika said. "There is a need."

The night was full of goodwill, smiles and charity, but good eating also was on the menu.

"This is some excellent potato soup," Haymon said.

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Article published Feb 21, 2008
Edward Jones collecting Food Bank donations
Colleen Burke
Reader Submitted

Local Drop off location for Food Bank of South Central Michigan is Karen Reeves & Colleen Burke's office

Edward Jones

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Personal Care Items: Soap, deoderant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, diapers, formula

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News

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[«--back to story](#)

Walk for Warmth gets help

POSTED: February 22, 2008

Article Photos



Community Action Agency Executive Assistant Cathy Pearson accepts a \$500 check from Marble Plus Knife Club Vice President Dennis Moberg, to be used for heating assistance locally through the CAA's Walk for Warmth campaign. The money is a portion of the proceeds raised during the club's annual Gun and Knife Show, held earlier this month. (Daily Press photo by Nicole Gearhart)

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